



View of the campus looking southeast to the Wasatch Mountains, University of Utah's eastern boundary

A Transit Success Story

**The University of Utah & Utah Transit
Authority Form a Partnership to
Serve Campus & Community**

**by
Ann Floor**

Last year, after driving his car to work every day and paying for a parking permit for 38 years, University of Utah employee Brian Nielson decided to try taking the new light rail train line to campus instead of driving his car. After all, with the Utah Transit Authority's Education Pass Program, all University of Utah students and employees ride free on UTA's bus and the light rail system.

"The commute is about 15 minutes longer each way, but I can read the morning paper on my way in and chat with friends on my way home. I can even catch a nap," he says. It's so convenient that he now drives his car to campus only once or twice a month.

In addition to reducing his gas consumption he doesn't have to worry about finding a parking place. "My wife says I come home more relaxed. She thinks it's the best thing that ever happened to me," he says. "It just works out better. I have no plans to change."



Students exiting train on campus.

15 Year Partnership Still Going Strong

In the early 1990s, student enrollment at the University of Utah was increasing and the campus was experiencing a construction boom. As the subsequent parking and traffic congestion problems increased, so did complaints from students, employees, and campus neighbors. University administrators Norm Chambers and Alma Allred decided something had to be done.

"We were hit with a double whammy," says Allred, director of commuter services. "We lost a big 300-stall parking lot to a construction project and then city legislation was passed requiring residential parking permits on neighborhood streets near campus, so we had to come up with a way to generate about 1,000 to 2,000 parking spaces before the next school year started," he adds. They decided to go for an innovative alternative transportation solution.

As part of their research, they discovered that in the mid-1980s the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) approached the University

and asked if it would be interested in implementing a bus pass program for a few hundred thousand dollars a year. At the time, the U perceived that its needs didn't require such a program, so they declined the offer. Conditions began to change in the late 1980s, when Chambers and Allred assumed responsibility for parking and transportation at the U. During early 1990, they began to meet regularly with UTA to discuss ways of decreasing dependence on parking through improvements in mass transit. Working together, the University and UTA decided to resurrect the bus pass idea – the UTA Education Pass or "Ed Pass" Program – and began a partnership that is still going strong today.

The Ed Pass Program

In exchange for an annual fee paid to UTA by the University, students, faculty, and staff who display both their University ID card and their UTA Ed Pass are allowed to ride UTA buses for free. When they arrive at the University, a campus shuttle

The only roundabout in North America where a train passes through it.



system, timed to meet the buses, takes people to their final destination on campus.

"The biggest hurdle was figuring out how to fund the program," says Norm Chambers, assistant vice president, Auxiliary Services, "The first year of the program, 1991, we received special one time approval from the University president and Board of Trustees to use auxiliary bond system reserves to fund the more than half-million dollars in first year cost. Support for the program quickly grew and parking permit fees were doubled the next year to pay for the program" he adds. With the support of student, faculty and staff organizations, in 1998 the funding source for the Ed Pass program was changed from parking permit fees to transportation fees. All students pay a transportation fee based on their credit hours and the University pays the transportation fee for employees as a benefits expense. During the first five years of the UTA Ed Pass Program, bus service to campus was expanded, resulting in ridership growing from less than 2,000 to nearly 6,000 per day. During the late 1990s, ridership started to level off.

Then during the fall of 1999, UTA opened its first light rail line running north and south along the length of the Salt Lake Valley, linking the city's downtown area with the residential south end. This generated a lot of interest from students, faculty, and staff and many of them started riding light rail to the downtown area and then transferring to a UTA bus to get to campus.

Since the Ed Pass program was implemented in the early 1990s, the population of the University of Utah has steadily grown to more than 40,000, but the number of permitted parking spaces has remained relatively constant.

Pioneered by the University and UTA, the Ed Pass program has been a model for other urban universities and colleges in Utah and is now offered at Brigham Young University, Weber State University, Utah Valley State College, Westminster College of Salt Lake City, and Salt Lake Community College. This brings the total participation in the program to well over 100,000.

Light Rail & 2002 Olympic Winter Games

In 1995, when Salt Lake City won the bid to host the 2002 Games, the University of Utah was designated as the site for the Olympic Village and the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. By 1997, preparation for the Olympics was well underway. Rice-Eccles Stadium underwent a major renovation and expansion from 34,000 seats to 45,600. With the installation of additional temporary seating, stadium capacity was expanded to more than 50,000 for the Opening Ceremonies. New student housing was completed in 2000, providing 2,300 new University student beds which were temporarily expanded to create 4,000 Olympic beds. Planning for transportation to and

from the campus during the Games presented another opportunity for the University to partner with UTA.

In early 2001, construction was started on the University Line light rail to connect downtown Salt Lake City to the University. At the beginning of fall semester 2001, there were approximately 10,000 parking spaces on main campus. During peak periods, approximately 96 percent of the parking spaces were full. The four percent that remained vacant were often hard to locate. As the site for the Olympic Village and Opening and Closing Ceremonies, the University had a strong stake in getting the first

phase of the University Line built in time for the Games. Under UTA's leadership, the new line was completed in record time and opened December 15, 2001, to an enthusiastic response from the public.

Awards

Recipient of the 2005 Utah Commuter Vision Award for promoting alternative transportation.

Recognized by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Transportation as one of the "Best Workplaces for Commuters" in 2005



In early January 2002 the Olympic organizing committee took possession of almost one-third of the 10,000 campus parking spaces. Chambers and Allred held their breath. Since classes were in session, there was concern that losing the parking spaces would be disruptive to students, faculty, and staff. This provided another opportunity to collaborate with UTA. During the fall of 2001, Chambers and Allred, along with the University's marketing department and student leadership, developed and implemented a comprehensive marketing plan to inform the campus and to encourage people to leave their cars at home and use transit to commute to campus. It was around this time that the U's Department of Parking Services changed its name to Commuter Services to further encourage a transit philosophy throughout campus. The results were phenom-



Statistics

- Total U of U enrollment: 29,012
- Total U of U employees: 16,340
- Campus size: 298 buildings located on 1,543 acres
- The U is the second largest generator of traffic in Utah
- Since 1991, transit ridership to campus has increased from 1,500 per day to more than 10,000 per day today.
- In 2004, approximately 25 percent of students, faculty, and staff commute to campus via UTA bus or light rail. That number grew to approximately 33% during the fall of 2005.
- During the past decade the campus population has continued to grow. Although the number of parking spaces has shrunk, there are more vacant parking spaces today, due to the success of the UTA Ed Pass Program.
- During the past five years, ridership on the campus shuttle has increased by more than 50 percent.
- The shuttle system currently carries 1.6 million-plus passengers per year.

University of Utah & Utah Transit Authority working together...

...to provide access

The UTA Ed Pass Program is funded through student and employee transportation fees. Students pay a per-credit hour transportation fee when they register. The University pays the employee transportation fee as a benefits expense. The campus shuttle system continues to be funded through parking permit fee revenues.

...to promote shuttle use

The University campus is built on a hillside with 298 buildings spread over 1,534 acres. The campus shuttle program makes it easier for people to get around campus. It also helps reduce traffic congestion and provides easier access to remote parking lots. Shuttle ridership has increased by more than 50 percent in the past five years. The system consists of 18 routes operated with a fleet of 24 forty-passenger shuttle buses. Currently, the shuttles carry more than 1.6 million passengers each year. A few years ago, UTA assisted the University in obtaining federal matching funds to acquire two new shuttle buses. Next year the University plans to purchase its first hybrid (electric/diesel powered) shuttle bus. Unfortunately, hybrid buses are substantially more expensive than conventionally powered buses. The University hopes, with UTA's support, to obtain matching funds to help offset the additional expense.

...to promote safety

Prior to the opening of the light rail line to the University in December 2001, UTA and the University worked closely together to promote safety. The marketing program included newspaper advertising, television spots, brochures, employee newsletters, information tables and lawn signs. The safety committee continues to meet on a quarterly basis to review concerns and promote safety.

...to ensure crowd control

In addition to students and employees of the University, the campus has many community visitors to its museums, athletics events and concerts, and its hospitals and clinics who use light rail as a convenient way to get to campus, thereby avoiding parking and traffic congestion hassles. UTA has done an outstanding job of coordinating light rail operations with University events. At football games and concerts, UTA has a representative present at the event command post to ensure coordination and to respond effectively to any needs.



Photo courtesy of Utah Transit Authority

Impact of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games on Transit Use

The semester before the Olympics, Professor Carol Werner's service-learning class developed an outreach program to let students know there would be fewer parking spaces, beginning after the Thanksgiving break. "We thought it was important to get the word out early so students would have time to reorganize their schedules and adapt to using alternative transportation," she says.

A table was set up where students could get a campus map showing where parking would be reduced and the bus schedules (this was pre-TRAX). They also developed a "teaching questionnaire" that used a series of questions and instructions to help students figure out how to use the UTA web site and which bus routes they could use. The University's Commuter Services offered a drawing for a high quality mountain bike as an incentive to get students to complete the questionnaire.

After the Olympics, a much larger survey showed whether students had used TRAX during the Olympics, how they felt about their experience, and whether they were continuing to use TRAX even though parking had been restored. Most respondents had taken TRAX at least once during the Olympics, so they could give informed evaluations of the service. They liked the service (frequency and reliability of trains; attractive cars), and they liked the variety of things they could do while on TRAX (relax, read, study, people watch, listen to the news or music, chat). The study showed that the more positive the experiences with TRAX, the more likely they were to continue using TRAX.

Findings from the student survey were corroborated by parking space assessments conducted by Alma Allred and his staff in the fall of 2002. Even though enrollment had increased, there were more empty spaces than in the previous fall, with fewer cars coming to campus. "TRAX was a big success right from the beginning," says Werner, "and the popularity is increasing as students systematically move to be closer to a TRAX stop and organize their lives around using TRAX instead of their cars."

enal. Thousands of students, faculty, and staff opted to leave their cars at home and commute to the University via mass transit. Even though the campus had lost more than 3,000 parking spaces due to the Olympics, the number of vacant parking spaces actually increased to nearly 1,000. As a result, the Olympic experience was a positive one for the campus. After all parking spaces were returned to the University in April 2002, the number of vacant spaces increased to more than 3,000. That trend continues today.

In mid-April 2002, following the Olympic Winter Games, construction on the second phase of the University Line began, extending light rail service through campus to the University's Health Sciences Complex. The project was completed in September 2003.

Special Event Prepaid Fare Zone

Recently, UTA and the University implemented a prepaid fare zone for special events. The University has two major facilities located directly on the light rail line—Rice-Eccles Stadium, home to the 2004 BCS Fiesta Bowl-winning Utah Utes football team and the Salt Lake Real MLS professional soccer team; and the Jon M. Huntsman Center, a 15,000 seat arena that hosts the "Runnin' Utes" basketball team and the nationally-ranked "Red Rocks" women's gymnastics team. A light rail station is located adjacent to each venue. Fortunately, events usually are not scheduled at the same time. The innovative prepaid fare zone program enables the two facilities to share parking facilities. Fans can park near the Huntsman Center and take light rail to the stadium and vice-versa.

Today, more than 10,000 people, or nearly one third of the campus population use transit to commute to campus. The partnership between the University and UTA is largely responsible for this success. "We're always working together to find new and innovative ways to promote the use of transit and solve operational challenges," says Chambers.

Over the years, these collaborative efforts—from the Ed Pass Program, to the University Line light rail project, to continuing partnerships on transit safety—have reduced traffic congestion on campus and in nearby neighborhoods, reduced campus parking demand, and improved air quality. Throughout their 15-year partnership, The University of Utah and UTA have raised the bar on standard practices at universities and colleges by demonstrating what can happen when organizations take the initiative to work together to solve problems. ♦

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